

# WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .



Union of  
Concerned  
Scientists

Citizens and Scientists for Environmental Solutions

## to prevent SPECIES INVASIONS

---

*Tips for gardening, traveling, boating and fishing, caring for pets and taking action!*

### Gardening

- If you don't know it, don't grow it! Avoid buying or growing plants that are known to be invasive such as purple loosestrife, English ivy, and Oriental bittersweet. Be especially careful when buying plants and seeds on the internet or by mail order – you may unknowingly contribute to the spread of an invasive species from one part of the country to another. Although some companies have voluntarily withdrawn known invasives from sale or labeled these species high risk, many have not. Lists of known invaders can be obtained from state and federal agencies as well as non-profit groups such as The Nature Conservancy, state Native Plant Societies, and various Exotic Pest Plant Councils.
- If you see your local nursery selling invasive plants or seeds, let them know about your concerns. Most are interested in avoiding problem species and will listen. The Maryland Native Plant Society has designed a card (downloadable from the society's website) that you can use to draw business' attention to invaders.
- Avoid buying and planting mixtures of seeds, especially ones labeled "wildflowers." Many contain invasive species. Others are too poorly labeled to tell.
- Landscape and garden with plants native to your area. Although many non-native plants are not invasive and can be grown without risk, emphasizing natives (especially pollinator-friendly species) can provide other advantages such as food, cover, or nesting sites for butterflies and birds. Native plants also require less water, fertilizers and pesticides. Contact your library or state's Native Plant Society for ideas on gardening with native species.

- Don't dump your aquatic plants or aquarium water into local waters. Many plants for water gardens and aquaria are highly invasive. Eurasian watermilfoil, a notorious aquatic weed that spreads rapidly and replaces natives, is one example of a plant that became established after being discarded from a personal aquarium.
- Be a good neighbor. Never dispose of unwanted plants or lawn or garden clippings in a nearby park or natural area. Invasive plants can spread from plant fragments, seeds, and berries.

### Traveling

- Never smuggle or carry fruit, seeds, live plants, berries, soil, insects, snails, lizards, snakes, or other animals into or out of the United States.
- Within the country, don't transport items such as hay, wood, soil, sod or gravel from one part to another. They may contain fungi, seeds, diseases, insects, or other potentially invasive organisms.
- Wash your boots before you hike in a new area. Weed seeds are common hitchhikers.
- Abide by local and international quarantines to prevent the spread of serious insect pests (like the Asian long-horned beetle), weeds (like witchweed), and diseases (like foot-and-mouth disease).

### Pets

- Buy from reputable dealers whose non-native pets are properly labeled, legally imported, and not harboring foreign pests and diseases that can spread to native wildlife.

*"From tree-killing insects to weeds that smother entire natural communities to mussels that multiply by the billions, invasive species are among the most ecologically devastating forces that humans have ever unleashed upon the natural world."—Van Driesche and Van Driesche*

- Don't release aquarium fish of any kind into a natural body of water. Some ornamental fish can and have established themselves in the wild with deleterious effects on native biodiversity. If you no longer want your pet fish, return it to a local pet shop for resale or trade, give it to another hobbyist, or donate it to a school, nursing home, or hospital.
- Don't release other pets, either. Rabbits can threaten rare native habitats, and cats prey on small mammals and birds. Some pet amphibians and reptiles may prey on a wide variety of native species and others carry diseases.
- Protect your pets, yourself, and wildlife from new diseases and vectors. Drain backyard containers where invasive mosquitoes breed.

## Boating and Fishing

- Never transport water, animals, or plants from one waterbody to another – either intentionally or accidentally! In particular, do not release live fish, including bait, into a new body of water.
- Remove all aquatic plants and animals from hulls, propellers, intakes, trailers, and gear before leaving a launch area. Where known invaders are present, dispose of these organisms where they won't wash back into the water. Always wash boats and other equipment land-side before traveling to a new waterway.
- Take extra precautions where zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil and other damaging invaders are established. Wash boats and equipment with hot (104°) high-pressure tapwater or dry for 5 days before using them in another water body.
- Anglers should be sure to remove suspicious material from and wash all fishing tackle, downriggers and lines to prevent spreading small, larval forms of aquatic invaders.
- Drain the water in bait buckets, live wells, and transom wells on land where aquatic invaders are a concern or back into the water from which it was taken, where they are not.

## Take action!

- Share you knowledge about the harm that invasives cause with your family, your friends, your coworkers and your neighbors.
- Join a local invasive plant eradication effort. Many parks and nature reserves (e.g., Audubon sanctuaries) manually remove invasive plants with the help of local volunteers. These outings are a great way to get some exercise, enjoy time outdoors, meet new friends, and gain the satisfaction of knowing that *you're* helping to protect our natural world.
- Learn to recognize common invaders and keep an eye out for signs of new ones. Check trees, gardens, vacant lots, roadsides, yards, agricultural areas, wetlands, ponds, and lakes. If you think you've found a new infestation, contact your county agricultural agent or state Department of Natural Resources. Early detection is crucial to stopping an invasive from becoming permanently established!

For more information on invasive species, including our *Infamous Invader* series and a list of informative Internet links, please visit the Invasive Species section of UCS' web page:

**<http://www.ucsusa.org>**  
Issue: Invasive Species

The **Union of Concerned Scientists** is a nonprofit partnership of scientists and citizens combining rigorous scientific analysis, innovative policy development, and effective citizen advocacy to achieve practical environmental solutions. For more information about UCS, please visit our website or email us at [ucs@ucsusa.org](mailto:ucs@ucsusa.org).

Van Driesche, J. and R. Van Driesche. 2000. *Nature Out of Place: Biological Invasions in the Global Age*. Island Press: Washington, DC.